PROPHECY FROM THE PAST

BENJAMIN CONSTANT

On Conquest and Usurpation

Edited and Translated by

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Is there anything whereof it may be said, see, this is new? It hath been already of old time, which was before us.

Ecclesiastes 1 10

On voit que l'histoire est une galerie de tableaux où il y a peu d'originaux et beaucoup de copies.

de Tocqueville, *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution*

Introduction

THE reader will find here a translation into English of selected passages from a tract published in the German city of Hanover It was written more than a century ago by Benjamin Constant, then a French refugee from the Napoleonic Empire The tract is an analysis and a prophecy dealing with the usurpation or as we should call it the dictatorship of Napoleon Bonaparte and with his conquests and aggressions Except in a footnote, Napoleon is nowhere mentioned by name For it was the view of the author

that the career of Napoleon merely illustrated the course of any government which is founded upon usurpation and is inspired by the lust of conquest.

It was in Paris in the month of June, 1939 that on the urging of a Frenchman I read this tract. He was then discussing with a group of friends from many countries the interesting proj ect of republishing it as the first in a series to be composed of the forgotten or neglected writings of men who once lived as we do now in an age of revolutionary wars They felt that we in our generation would not be acting as if we were the first who had ever had to deal with usurpers and conquerors if only we had not forgotten the past, if only we knew how our forefathers had passed through many an ordeal not at all unlike our own They believed that the revival of the for gotten classics of resistance to dictatorship and aggression would enlighten our minds and would compose our spirits For they found as they read

these works —after reading the newspapers and listening to the radio —that the world seemed less surprising and the future less obscure. The reader will judge whether the passages collected here justify their belief that the project suspended by the outbreak of actual war and abandoned when Paris fell is still worth carrying on

The great interest of Benjamin Constant s tract is that it was conceived in the years while Napoleon was still the master of Europe. It was published at the end of 1813 that is to say a year after Napoleon s retreat from Moscow and in the weeks immediately following his defeat in Germany at the Battle of Leipzig We who have the benefit of hindsight know that the downfall of Napoleon had begun But between December 1813 when Benjamin Constant finished writing this tract and the battle of Waterloo in June 1815 as long a time elapsed as between December 1940 when these lines are written and the

beginning of the summer after next summer

Such periods seem short in retrospect but they are felt to be very long as we know by those who live through them and so we must remember that what now seems to us the foregone conclusion of the Napoleonic wars seemed to Benjamin Constant only a distant hope. Thus in his preface to the first edition of this tract *On the Spirit of Conquest and of Usurpation in Their Bearing on European Civilization* he says

'The present work is part of a Treatise on Politics completed some time ago the state of France and of Europe seemed to render its publication unlikely

'*The continent of Europe had become a vast* prison-house cut off from all communication with England that noble haven of thought and freedom that illustrious sanctuary of the human spirit. Suddenly from the far corners of the earth two great nations spoke in unison and the fires

of Moscow lit up the dawn of the freedom of the world It is permissible to hope that France will not be left out of the great liberation



When he wrote these lines Benjamin Constant was at the height of his powers. Born in 1767 educated in Germany England Scotland and France, he was twenty-two when the Bastille fell he was forty-eight in the year when Napoleon lost at Waterloo and the Congress of Vienna had begun to lay the foundations of a peace which save for short and localized wars, was to last a hundred years. Benjamin Constant lived the best years of his life in that quarter century between 1789 and 1815 As the friend of Mme. de Stael and of Mme. Recamier as a brilliant figure in the Europe of his day Constant had every opportunity to observe at first hand the events of a period which is in so many ways analogous with our own. He spent some years in Paris under the Di

rectory he saw Napoleon make his first seizure of power in the coup d etat which overthrew the Directory· he lingered on in France under the Consulate of Napoleon until 1803 when finally he had to share Mme de Stael s exile at Coppet.

For years he had been at work on a monumental task—that History of Religions the complete edition of which was only to appear in print in 1831 a year after his death During the Napoleonic period then he had been meditating upon morals and philosophy So although it is said that he spent only a few weeks writing his *Conquest and Usurpation* this explains why besides a penetrating analysis of the political aspects of these disorders the tract displays a profound sense of the moral and philosophic issues involved The issues are ancient and they recur Although one hundred and twenty-eight years have passed since the tract was first published it provides us, I think with the most incisive and succinct refuta

tions so far made to the claims of those who today as in Napoleon s day offer the world a new order based on the oldest fallacies and cruelties known to man



It is hard for us today to remember or to keep clearly in our minds, the steps by which Napoleon *rose to power or to realize how immense was the* relief of the peoples of Europe when in the spring of 1814 the Allied forces seemed to have brought about his final defeat.

Napoleon had begun his rise to power some fifteen years before Constant published his tract, when on November 5 1799 he overthrew the Directory by his famous coup du 18 Brumaire and had himself proclaimed consul together with Sièyes and Roger Ducos Three years later in 1802 as the result of a plebiscite he became sole Consul for life with the power to name his successor The next year at Paris in 1804 he was

crowned Emperor of the French by the Pope, Pius VII Six years after that, in 1810 with his marriage to Marie Louise daughter of the Emperor of Austria he reached the zenith of his power and the birth of an heir in 1811 might seem to have consolidated his dominion over Europe. By that date he had dictated the terms of six peace treaties He had faced triumphantly the opposition of five European coalitions Austria, Prussia Italy Holland the German states Poland and Spain were all conquered or dominated by him Russia was his ally The Pope who had crowned him was now his prisoner England alone held out against him Yet there were signs of weakness England s fleet still ruled the seas at the two extremities of Europe in Russia and in Spain he was losing ground

The Franco-Russian Alliance foreshadowed in the Treaty of Tilsit in 1807 and signed at Erfurt in 1808 had from the start had little chance of

lasting Napoleon had originally encouraged both the Poles and the Turks to resist Russian de mands· after signing the alliance with Russia, he dared not break with either lest the Poles desert his army and the Turks turn toward England On its side, Russia had no intention of recognizing the Duchy of Warsaw nor of relinquishing its age-old dream of aggrandizement at the expense of Turkey So when the Tsar refused rigorously to apply the provisions of the Continental Block ade against England Napoleon seized upon the refusal as a pretext for denouncing the alliance. He marched on Russia. On June 12 1812 he crossed the Niemen with an army of five hundred thousand in September he entered Moscow for three days he sat in the Kremlin awaiting a request for terms of peace from the vanquished Russians. But no request came. Instead the city suddenly burst into flames and on October 19 there began the retreat of the Grande Armee

through the snows of Russia. In December an army of forty thousand straggled back into Germany

In Spain trouble was brewing Ever since Joseph Bonaparte had been placed upon the throne of Spain in 1808 the country had been in revolt. The victories of Wellington s armies and the fierce resistance of the Spanish guerilla forces had time and time again brought about defeats for the French armies In 1811 Massena was defeated before Torres Vedras and in 1813 the British victory of Vittoria forced the French to evacuate the peninsula.

Napoleon had by then lost two armies one in Russia and one in Spain He managed to assemble a third army of three hundred thousand men and in May of 1813 he started his German campaign At first he met with success Advancing into Germany itself he made a supreme effort to defeat the Allies at the battle of Leipzig The battle

lasted for three days October 16 to 18 and ended with his complete defeat and the annihilation of his third army when his Saxon allies deserted him on the field of battle and joined his enemies. Even then although the Allies offered to negotiate a peace, leaving to France its natural frontiers of the Alps the Rhine and the Pyrenees Napoleon refused to negotiate From then on events moved rapidly France was invaded from all sides The Prussians were acclaimed in Holland Joseph was forced to flee from Spain Murat in Naples joined the coalition Denmark made peace with England and Russia Napoleon stood alone, with sixty thousand men against the most powerful coalition ever to be assembled. On March 30 1814 Paris surrendered to the Allies Napoleon was deserted by his marshals was deposed by the Senate he himself had created and on April 11 he was forced by the Treaty of Fontainebleau to abdicate. He retired to the island

of Elba and a Bourbon the brother of Louis XVI was restored to the throne of France under the name of Louis XVIII

On March 20 1815 less than a year later Napoleon having escaped from Elba re-entered Paris in triumph This was the period of the famous one hundred days Perhaps he was not quite the same Napoleon as before, for Benjamin Constant reports him as declaring I am growing older the settled role of a constitutional monarch might suit me very well Whether Constant believed him or not is hard to determine. Outwardly at any rate he appeared to do so for Benjamin Constant, the man of action forgot the insight of Benjamin Constant, the political moralist he accepted from Napoleon the post of Counsellor of State He offered an explanation of his action later on saying On the 20th of March I looked up I saw that the throne had disappeared and that France was still there. France

seemed to him to be facing three dangers the imperial despotism, a foreign victory or the counter revolution. And wishing to save France, he chose the lesser evil he let himself hope that the leopard could change his spots, that Napoleon, the dictator could become Napoleon, the liberal leader of the French people. In so doing he totally disregarded the experience of the past and the logic of his own prophecy made fifteen months before. Then he had written that no dictator (or usurper as he called him) could rule at home except by coercion or abroad except by conquest that a system of conquest held in itself the seeds of future wars and that there could be no peace anywhere while usurpation threatened the security of the whole civilization of Europe.

Events were soon to prove how correct was his prophecy how mistaken his later practice. Napoleon may have been sincere when he tried to persuade the Great Powers gathered at the Con

gress of Vienna that he was willing to accept the terms of the Treaty of Paris which had fixed the frontiers of France as those of 1792 But to them and to all of Europe he was still the usurper he was still the disorganizing force which had destroyed the existing European order As long as he ruled France there could be no sense of security in Europe, that "great fear" of which Ferrero writes in his recent book *Reconstruction* could not be dissipated And so he had again to take up arms against Europe.

Blucher and Wellington concentrated their forces in Belgium and awaited the arrival of the Austrians and Russians on France's eastern frontier To prevent the junction of the English and Prussian armies Napoleon took the offensive and on June 16 successfully attacked the Prussian army at Ligny A violent rain storm on the following day slowed up his advance against the English when his troops arrived late that evening

Wellington was already entrenched on the famous plateau near Waterloo On June 18 the fateful battle took place This time the defeat of Napoleon was final The Chambers forced him to abdicate for the second time and suggested that he leave for America. He delayed too long, reaching the port of Rochefort only on July 3 By that time English ships were blocking the harbor and rather than be arrested as a fugitive, he threw himself upon the mercy of the English They dared not risk leniency of any kind lest the peace of Europe be again disturbed and so they took him on the Bellorophon to the Island of Saint Helena where he died in 1821



Constant divides his tract into two parts Part I deals with the spirit of conquest, Part II with usurpation. In the introduction to Part I he observes that for power to endure it is essential that it be in harmony with the spirit of its time Con

quest and war he finds are not consistent with the spirit of the modern world ours is the age of commerce. In such an age the peoples of Europe have more to gain from peace than from war the development of commerce has begun to make possible for all men the enjoyment of a higher standard of living Thus the incentive to war is gone and a government which sought to lead its people to a war of conquest would have to induce them to act against their deepest instincts and convictions. To lead them successfully into such a war the dictator would first have to create a separate military class He eloquently describes what such a class would be like. It would be sustained only by fierce and greedy self-interest.

These new Vandals would overrun the earth using the tools of civilization to destroy civilization. Separated from the rest of mankind by a moral gulf they would band together like a pack of wolves ready to fall upon the unprotected

flocks. He shows that a body of men whose purposes set them apart from the rest of the nation would be a constant danger to it. Such an army he writes must be kept busy: it must be kept far away: it must be provided with adversaries A system of conquest thus holds in itself the seeds of future wars the ruler who embarks on a course of conquest is driven inexorably forward by those forces which he himself has conjured up he can never again return to the path of peace.

From this point on I think that I cannot do better than to let Benjamin Constant speak for himself. The reader will understand that, although the narrative from here on will be continuous it is in fact made up of selected passages from a far longer original text. In order not to break the continuity I shall not divide it up into chapters (as in the original text) but shall content myself with occasional marginal headings

Benjamin Constant
On the Spirit of Conquest and Usurpation

Part One
The Spirit of Conquest

A Government Imbued with the Spirit of Conquest Must Deceive and Coerce Its People

I HAVE shown I think that a government imbued with the spirit of invasion and conquest is obliged to corrupt a section of its people in order to create an instrument for the active carrying out of its designs I shall now prove that in addition to corrupting this smaller section it will also have to confuse the minds warp the judgment and undermine the principles of the rest of the people, so as to obtain that passive obedience and willingness for sacrifice which are essential to a regime of conquest.

When a people are warlike by nature their rulers need not use deception to lead them to war Attila pointed with his finger to that part of the world which his Huns were to seize and they fell upon it, for Attila was merely the mouthpiece and representative of their wishes. But today since war does not add to the real welfare of the people but, on the contrary brings them sufferings and privation deceit and false reasoning are necessary to make the masses anywhere assent to a war of conquest. No government would dare to say to its people Let us set *out to conquer the world* For with one voice the people would reply We do not want to conquer the world."

So those in authority speak of national independence, of national honor of natural frontiers of preventive measures of self-defense,—and of heaven only knows what else. For the vo-

cabulary of hypocrisy and injustice is inexhaustible.

They speak of national independence, as though the independence of one nation were endangered by the existence of other independent nations

They talk of national honor as though their national honor were impaired because other nations preserved their national honor

They proclaim it a sacred duty to adjust their frontiers a doctrine which once accepted banishes forever all possibility of peace or justice. For governments invariably adjust" their frontiers outward. No nation that I know of has volunteered to give up part of its own territory to improve its frontiers.

They invoke their commercial interests to justify their conquests as if to conscript the youth of the nation to deprive agriculture and industry of their best workers and above all, to erect be

tween themselves and the rest of the world blood-drenched barricades were to serve the interests of commerce. Commerce depends upon good relations between nations it can survive only where there is fair dealing it prospers where there is peace.

Under the pretext of self-defense, a government of conquest attacks its most peace-loving neighbors its most defenseless allies imputing hostile designs to them and claiming that it does so in anticipation of premeditated aggression If its unhappy victims are quickly subdued it boasts of having forestalled an attack If its victims resist effectively a government of conquest calls the whole world to witness See for yourselves it cries, they intended war for they are defending themselves!

Let no one think that such conduct would be the accidental result of a particularly vicious leadership On the contrary it would be the inescapa

ble necessity of the situation Any modern government bent on extended conquest would be forced to use false pretexts and scandalous lies This would indeed be criminal and we do not try to condone it but the crime does not consist in employing these means but in voluntarily choosing an end which necessitates the use of these means. Thus the government would have to bring the same pressure to bear upon the intellectual faculties of the mass of the people as it had previously done upon the moral qualities of the military class It would have to make every effort to eradicate logic from the minds of the people just as it had done its best to stifle humane instincts in the soldiers. Words would lose their meaning moderation would presage violence justice usher in iniquity The law of nations would become a code of expropriation and barbarism The human race would be driven

back to those dark ages which it had come to look upon as the disgrace of its history



Let us assume nevertheless that some vestiges of reason remain in some respects this will be an added misfortune. For coercion will have to make up for the inadequacy of propaganda Since men everywhere will try to avoid shedding their blood in expeditions of conquests the usefulness of which has not been proved to them the government will have to subsidize a mob of greedy underlings to break down this general opposition We shall find spying and informing,—those ever recurring resources of governments which create fictitious crimes and fictitious duties —encouraged and rewarded hirelings of the party like ferocious bloodhounds will hunt down and imprison innocent fugitives One part of the population will thus be training for crime by acquiring the habit of breaking all laws while the rest be

come familiar with infamy by learning to make a living from the misfortunes of their fellow-men

And all these tribulations will be endured, not for legitimate defense but to acquire distant lands whose possession adds nothing to national prosperity



Under such conditions, a people sink into moral degradation and an ever increasing ignorance. They grow weary in the midst of victory

they are haunted by a feeling of having been led astray and of having missed their goal

This, of course is true only of futile and wanton wars of aggression. There can be no question of the necessity of repelling an aggressor Then all classes must join together for all classes are threatened But as their motive is not base plunder they are not corrupted As their zeal is based on conviction coercion is unnecessary Since the disruption of their social occupations is due to the

fulfilment of sacred obligations and the defense of vital interests it does not have the same effect as the disruption caused by arbitrary power The people see an end to the disruption they submit to it joyfully as a means of regaining peace and when peace comes they return to their occupations with renewed energy with sharpened awareness conscious that they have used their strength usefully and with dignity

But it is one thing to fight for one s country and another thing to fight against those who are defending a country of their own

The spirit of conquest tries to confuse these two issues When certain governments spread their armies over the face of Europe and still speak of defending their hearths they perhaps call their hearths wherever they have set the fires of their destruction

The Advantage to an Aggressor Nation of Peace Sentiments in Other Nations

IT IS probable that the tendency of modern men to prefer peace to war will at first actually give a great advantage to the nation whose government has forced it to become an aggressor Nations absorbed in the pursuits of peace will be slow to resist they will be willing to sacrifice some of their rights to retain the rest they will hope by acquiescing in the curtailment of their freedom to be allowed to continue to live in peace. By a curious paradox the stronger the peace sentiment is in these nations the easier will be the early triumphs of the nation which denounces such sentiments

But what effect will these triumphs have on the people of the conquering nation? Even although they can expect no improvement in their real welfare will they not derive some satisfaction from

a feeling of pride? Will they not claim their share of glory? Far from it. Hatred of conquest is so strong today that all men will feel impelled to clear themselves of blame for it. There will be a general revulsion none the less vigorous for being silent. The government will discover that the mass of its citizens stand aloof gloomy and dejected spectators. Only the long monologue of official power will be heard throughout the empire. At best, the monologue will sometimes become a dialogue *as servile speakers repeat to their masters* the phrases he has written for them. But the people will stop listening to tedious orations which they can never hope to interrupt. They will turn aside from the empty display which has brought them only trouble and danger and with whose object they have no sympathy

Modern Conquest Holds a New Terror for the Conquered

IT IS true that today conquered peoples are not sold into slavery that their land is not taken from them that they are not forced to cultivate it for the benefit of others, and that they are not branded as a subordinate race, belonging to the victors

Hence their fate may appear outwardly to be more tolerable than it was of old. When the storm is over order seems to reappear Cities still stand market places fill up shops reopen. At first it seems as if only names and a few outward forms had changed Let us look more closely The ancient conquerors often annihilated whole nations But when they did not annihilate them they left intact the things which men hold most dear —

The author was writing it will be recalled more than a century ago. H B.L.

their customs their laws their usages, their gods One cannot say as much for modern conquerors The vanity of civilized men is a more cruel tor ment than the pride of barbarians.

The primitive conquerors were satisfied with outward submission they did not inquire into the private lives or local customs of their victims Re turning to their distant provinces the vanquished found again all that gave meaning to their lives their childhood customs their sacred rites that fund of common memories which enables a peo-ple though it be subjugated by a foreign con queror to retain a sense of nationhood

The conquerors of today whether peoples or princes are resolved to gaze across the level surface of their empire to the farthest outpost and to en counter no slightest deviation from uniformity

The same laws the same administrative measures the same rulings and if possible the

same language, this is the supreme aim of their social organization.



It is surprising that uniformity should have been so warmly admired by the leaders of a revolution made in the name of the rights of man Their systematic minds were at first enraptured by its symmetry Their love of power soon discovered what a tremendous advantage could be derived from this symmetry Although patriotism exists only by reason of a deep attachment to local interests customs and usages, our so-called patriots declared war upon all these. They dried up the natural springs of patriotism and tried to replace them by a fictitious attachment to an abstract idea stripped of everything that appeals to the imagination or that speaks to memory

The present despotism which has followed

[1] Napoleon's Government. H.B.L.

upon the former demagoguery has shrewdly adopted the same course. The two extremes have met in this because, fundamentally they are in agreement on one thing: the will to tyranny Local interests and traditions contain a germ of resistance which a centralized authority tolerates unwillingly and attempts to eradicate at the first opportunity It finds the isolated individual easier to deal with without effort it crushes him beneath its mighty weight.



Conquest therefore, today holds a new and hitherto unknown terror for the conquered It pursues them into their inner life it maims them spiritually in order to force them to conform. In the past, the representatives of a conquered people had to crawl on their knees before their conquerors today it is the conscience of man which must be prostrated

The governments of the French Revolution. H.B.L.

Today No Nation Can Hold All Others in Subjection

TODAY no one nation can expect to retain for any length of time sufficient power to hold all other nations in subjection A nation which aspires to such a domination will soon find itself in a more dangerous position than its weakest neighbor It will become the object of universal execration. It will call down upon itself the condemnation and hatred of all mankind sooner or later they will rise up and encircle it.



Once the peoples of the earth have recovered *their reason and regained their courage,* to what corner of the globe could the threatened aggressor turn for help? To what sentiment could he appeal? What vindication will not be discredited in advance coming from one who in his hour of triumph never shrank from persecution and devasta

tion provocation and falsehood? Will he call for justice? He has violated it Humanity? He has trampled it under foot. Good faith? All his actions have begun with perjury The sanctity of alliances? He has treated his allies as his slaves.

Will he count on help from his new subjects? He has deprived them of all that they held dear of all that they respected he has disturbed the ashes of their fathers and shed the blood of their sons

A United World Will Turn Against the Aggressor and Defeat Him

THE world will unite against him Peace, independence and justice, these will be the rallying words and because they have been so long proscribed these words will take on an almost supernatural power A cry of union

and liberation will resound from one end of the earth to the other A sense of common decency will inspire the hesitating and the timid. No man will dare to remain neutral lest he be a traitor to himself

Then the aggressor will realize that he has counted too much upon the degradation of mankind He will find that calculations based on cor ruption and perfidy are as unreliable as they are mean as deceptive as they are vile. He once sneered at the simple-mindedness of virtue, at the confidence in disinterestedness which seemed to him a chimera, at the appeal to an ex altation of which he could not conceive the motive nor the persistence. Now he discovers the foolishness of egoism that he is no less ignorant of good than honest men are of evil that to under stand men it is not enough to despise them. The human race becomes an enigma to him. All around him men speak of generosity of sacrifice

and of devotion to duty This language will ring strangely to his ear he will not know how to use this idiom A memorable example of cynicism and perfidy the victim of his own corruption he will be silenced by the immensity of his miscalculation

Modern Nations Then Have Nothing to Hope from Conquest

THE commercial nations of modern Europe have nothing to hope from conquest. A useless war therefore is today the greatest outrage which a government can commit without compensation of any kind it weakens all social guaranties it imperils every kind of freedom it authorizes tyranny at home and abroad it divides the nation it prepares future

destructions by past destructions: the misfortunes of the present generate misfortunes in the future.



I have sometimes wondered what would be the answer of one of our modern emulators of Alexander or Attila if his people should some day speak their mind saying: Like the [illegible] you are of another climate, of another continent, of another species from ourselves. Learn what civilization is, if you wish to rule [illegible] lized epoch. Learn what peace is if you wish to reign over peaceable peoples. Or go [illegible] find men like yourself to whom peace [illegible] ment is nothing, who find no charm in [illegible] they risk it daily in mortal combat [illegible] lowmen. Stable habits, fond attach[illegible] genious arts, calm and profound [illegible] All elegant and noble enjoyments [illegible] renders dear and which security [illegible]

—these are to us the benefits of human inter course. This is our heritage, thus our patrimony Man of another world you shall no longer rob us of them.

Part Two

Usurpation

The Difference Between a Legitimate Government and Usurpation

IT IS not my purpose here to examine the various forms of government.

I intend to compare a legitimately constituted government with an arbitrarily constituted one, not to compare one form of legal government with another. We are no longer living at a time when monarchy is considered to be an unnatural function.[1] Neither do I write in a country where one is ordered to brand the republican form of government as anti-social.

* * *

Under the French Revolution. H.B.L.

Under Napoleon. H.B.L.

The name of Switzerland recalls five centuries of private happiness and public loyalty that of Holland three centuries of activity good sense, good faith and the most scrupulous honesty even beneath the yoke of a foreign conqueror



Finally who can fail to admire the monarchical government of England? There we see the rights of the citizens secure, popular elections maintaining the body politic in vigorous health in spite of some abuses more apparent than real, freedom of the press respected talent assured of success, and in the peoples of all classes that proud and calm confidence of men protected by the laws of their country A few months ago men wondered to what corner of the earth they might flee to be free to write to speak to think and to breathe were England defeated.

Usurpation does not offer the advantages either

of a monarchy or of a republic and what causes this truth to be overlooked is that because in both cases one man is entrusted with power no proper distinction is made between two forms of government which have no other characteristic in common.



Monarchy as it exists in most European states, is an institution which time has modified and custom has softened The monarch is in a sense, an abstract being We see in him not an individual but a whole race of kings the tradition of centuries.

Usurpation is a force which nothing can modify or soften It necessarily bears the imprint of the personality of the usurper and because of the inevitable opposition of all previously existing interests, the usurper must live in an atmosphere of perpetual distrust and hostility Monarchy is not a preference granted to one man at the ex

pense of other men it is a supremacy acknowledged in advance it discourages ambition but does not wound men s vanity Usurpation requires the immediate abdication of all men in favor of one man it everywhere arouses the claims of vanity and self interest.

To announce that one is a hereditary monarch is not enough a monarch is made hereditary not by the throne which he intends to hand down but by the throne which he has inherited No monarch can be called hereditary until after the second generation Until then usurpation may call itself monarchy but the regime will continue to be marked by the revolutionary disturbances from which it sprang The so-called new dynasties are as stormy as any faction and as oppressive as any tyranny To live under them is to live under the anarchy of Poland or the despotism of Constantinople and often perhaps of both

There is no element of personal adventure in

the action of a king who ascends the throne of his ancestors. He has no reputation to make he is unique of his kind and he need compete with no one. A usurper on the other hand, has as many rivals as past regrets present jealousies and future hopes can devise he must justify his rise to power· he is under a tacit compulsion to prove by great deeds that he deserves so great a position he dares not fail the expectation of the public whose emotions he has so dangerously aroused The most reasonable and well-founded inaction becomes dangerous 'We must give the French people something new every three months said a man who understands these things well He has kept his word

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Napoleon. H B L.

A Usurper Can Never Remain Inactive

NOW it is doubtless an admirable thing to be capable of extraordinary actions when the public interest requires them but it is a misfortune to be driven by considerations of personal interest to attempt extraordinary actions if the public interest does not require them The do-nothing kings have been much abused God give us their indolence rather than the activity of a usurper!

Add the vices of his character to the difficulties of his position for certain vices are inherent in usurpation itself others are actually produced by it.

What cunning violence and perjury are necessary to his success! The usurper must invoke the very principles which he is preparing to violate, he must make agreements which he intends to

break he must play upon the good faith of some, take advantage of the weakness of others awaken greed encourage injustice, urge corruption in other words, force men s worst instincts to a rank and rapid growth

* * *

Uneasy tormented with fear the usurper does not believe in his own claims although he forces the world to recognize them. Illegitimacy haunts him like a ghost it is in vain that he seeks solace in pomp and victory The spectre accompanies him in his most splendid pageants and on the battlefields. He promulgates laws and then changes them he establishes constitutions and then violates them he founds empires and then overthrows them he is never satisfied with his institutions built upon sand

"Those who corrupted the Greek Republics," says Montesquieu did not always become tyrants This was because they were more attracted

by eloquence than by the arts of war But in our mass society eloquence is powerless armed force alone can establish usurpation armed force alone can maintain it.

Usurpation Means a Return to the Regime of Conquest

HENCE under a usurper there are endless wars they are the pretexts for the usurper to surround himself with armed guards they are the opportunity for him to train his guards to obedience they are the means used to dazzle the public and to substitute the prestige of conquest for the prestige of the past. Usurpation revives the regime of conquest thus it entails all the disadvantages already described in such a regime.

* * *

Established property owners are the natural defenders of a legitimate sovereign they are the

born enemies of a usurper Now I believe it is acknowledged that for a government to function peaceably authority and property must be in agreement. If they disagree there is bound to be a struggle and at the end of the struggle, either property will have been seized or the government overthrown.

Now it may appear easier for a usurper to redistribute property than to create a new aristocracy



But to make some men rich means to make other men poor· to create new property owners means to despoil former owners of their property Usurpation on a grand scale leads to petty usurpation For each interest placated by such methods ten are aroused against the usurper

Thus in spite of the deceptive similarity which appears to exist between monarchy and usurpation when they are both regarded as systems

which place power in the hands of one man no two systems could differ more Everything which strengthens a monarch is a threat to a usurper those things which in a monarchy favor union harmony and peace, foment resistance, hatred and disorder under usurpation

These arguments of course apply with equal force as between usurpation and an established republic.

Despotism Is Satisfied With Acquiescence Usurpation Exacts Assent

I AM assuredly no partisan of despotism but if I had to choose between usurpation and a well-established despotism then the latter might well seem preferable to me

A despot puts an end to all outward forms of freedom to justify overthrowing institutions and

substituting others a usurper needs to retain these forms but in *possessing himself of them* he defiles them Since it is dangerous for a usurper to allow true public opinion to exist but necessary for him that it should appear to function he must first so terrorize the people that true public opinion is stifled and then so terrorize them that they express false opinions which they do not have.

When a despot of old sent his executioner to lead a disgraced favorite to the scaffold victim and executioner acted their part in silence when a usurper prosecutes an innocent man he orders a campaign of defamation against the victim so that the slander repeated often enough may seem to be a sentence passed by the nation A despot forbids discussion and only demands obedience a usurper orders a mock inquiry as a preamble to the approval which he requires

Usurpation and Public Opinion

THIS counterfeit of freedom combines the vices of both anarchy and slavery there is no limit to the cruelty of a tyrant determined to obtain an appearance of consent. Peaceable men are persecuted because they are considered indifferent, energetic men because they are considered dangerous submission brings no peace, activity no satisfaction.

It is usurpation which has devised that alleged approbation those addresses those monotonous felicitations the habitual tribute paid to power through the ages by the same men in the same words about the most contradictory measures Aping the outward appearance of courage, cowardice thus congratulates itself upon its shame and gives thanks for its misfortunes A prearranged farce which deceives no one and which the shafts of bitter ridicule ought long since to have

done to death! But ridicule attacks everything and destroys nothing Because they ridicule the regime, men think that they have recovered their honor and their independence and pleased at having by their words disowned their actions they are content to let their actions belie their words

Who does not realize that the more oppressive a government is the louder will become the frantic enthusiasm of its terrified citizens? Can you not see the informers and soldiers guarding the ledger which each citizen must sign with a trembling hand? Have you not read those proclamations which brand as subversive and rebellious those whose vote might be in the negative? What is the meaning of questioning a people under the threat of jail and beneath a regime of terror except to force the adversaries of tyranny to reveal themselves that they may the better be struck down?

[1] A reference to the plebiscites arranged by Napoleon H B.L.

Yet the usurper keeps a record of these eulogies and these addresses history will judge him by these testimonials of his own choosing When a people were so abject, it will be said the govern ment must have been tyrannical. The Romans did not bow down before Marcus Aurelius but before Tiberius and Caracalla

Usurpation and Freedom of the Press

DESPOTISM stifles the freedom of the press usurpation parodies it. Now when freedom of the press is completely suppressed public opinion is dormant but it is not misled But on the contrary when subsidized journalists take over the press they argue as if they were really trying to convince their readers they declaim as if there were an opposition they attack men s reputations as if their victims were free to refute them Their

outrageous libels and ferocious jests foreshadow barbarous and illegal convictions Just as viewed from afar the savages madly dancing around the victims they will soon devour may seem to be still fighting these tortured creatures so this parody of a free press makes it appear that under usurpation men still are free to resist persecution

To sum up despotism is satisfied with acquiescence and recognizes the right of men to remain silent usurpation compels men to talk it solicits their inner consent and by forcing them to lie to their conscience it strips them of the last solace of the oppressed

Usurpation Degrades a People

WHEN a people are only enslaved but not degraded they still have the hope of better things to come if a favorable opportunity

occurs they are able to take advantage of it. Despotism leaves this hope to mankind The yoke of Philip II and the scaffolds of the Duke of Alba did not degrade the valiant people of Holland But usurpation degrades a people as well as oppressing them it accustoms them to trample upon the things they most respect, to court those they despise to despise themselves. And even after its collapse and provided that it lasts a little while, usurpation renders a people incapable of a return to freedom or of progress of any kind Commodus was overthrown but the praetorian guards put the empire up for sale and the people submitted to the buyer

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Why Usurpation Cannot Now Endure

AFTER this picture of usurpation, it is comforting to be able to prove that today usurpation is as gross an anachronism as the system of conquest.

Republics endure because each citizen is deeply attached to his rights because the enjoyment of freedom brings him happiness satisfaction security and vigor time, custom and a pious reverence for the past enable monarchies too to endure. Usurpation however can be founded only upon the personal supremacy of the usurper

Now there are periods in the history of mankind when it is quite impossible for an individual to attain to the supremacy necessary for usurpation Such was the period in Greece from the expulsion of Pisistratus until the reign of Philip of Macedon such also were the first five centuries

in Rome from the fall of the Tarquins to the civil wars   No name in those five centuries stands out above the legion of the great men of the republic.

There are periods on the other hand when the governing of peoples seems to belong to the first comer Ambitious men full of audacity and talent tried in vain to enslave the Roman Republic. In danger and amid hardships for twenty years Caesar labored to reach the steps of the throne —and died assassinated before he ascended them. Hiding behind an arras Claudius was discovered by some soldiers he was proclaimed emperor and ruled for fourteen years

The dissimilarity between these two periods is not due only to the exhaustion which follows upon periods of prolonged unrest it is due also to the advance of civilization.

When the human race is still in a state of primitive ignorance and servitude   nations like

sheep follow the leadership not only of brilliant men but of any men whom chance happens to single out. As the power of reasoning develops men begin to question the justice of mere chance and to perceive an equality among men which is opposed to the supremacy of one man over other men



Thus it is probable that Cyrus had to exert less effort and display less genius to subjugate the Persian barbarians than did a petty sixteenth century tyrant in Italy to maintain the power which he had usurped



Twenty years ago France and Europe were in much the same position as were Greece and Rome in the periods we have mentioned There were so many equally enlightened men that no one man dared claim for himself the exclusive right to rule.

And in the first ten years of our recent disorders, no one man was able to dominate the scene.

The New Barbarians

UNFORTUNATELY at just such periods a danger threatens mankind. Just as a boiling liquid is cooled by pouring into it a stream of colder liquid so when barbarians invade a civilized nation or when an ignorant mass within it obtains control of its destiny its progress is arrested and it degenerates

This is what happened to Greece as a result of the Macedonian influence to Rome as a result of the successive admissions of the conquered peoples and finally to the whole Roman Empire because of invasions by the barbaric hordes from the north It became possible again for one man to be

The French Revolution.

supreme, and consequently usurpation became possible again. The emperors were nearly always made by the barbarian legions

In France, the disorders of the revolution brought an ignorant mass to power and discouraged the enlightened classes The new incursion of barbarians produced results similar to those in Greece and Rome but since their number was proportionately far smaller their influence was less lasting

There was a time when whole nations were proud to sacrifice themselves for the glory of one man today a leader has to pretend that he is acting only for the good of his nation Sometimes he tries to talk of himself of the world s duty to him and to revive a style of oratory unknown since Cambyses and Xerxes. But there is no response to these appeals and repudiated by the silence of his own followers he falls back upon a

hypocrisy which in itself is a tribute to the equality of man

If it were possible to look into the hearts of the common people of a nation outwardly submissive to the usurper who oppresses them one would find that, by some dim instinct, they had fixed their whole attention upon the moment when their oppressor should fall. Their enthusiasm is made up of a curious mixture of calculation and mockery Putting little trust in their own convictions they appear to be endeavoring simultaneously to stupefy themselves by their shouts and to console themselves by their jeers yet they seem also to foresee the hour when the illusion will be dispelled

The Failure of Conquest and Usurpation

ARE you interested to discover the degree to which facts prove the double impossibility of conquest and usurpation in our present society? Consider then the events of the past six months Conquest had established usurpation throughout the greater part of Europe. This usurpation sanctioned and recognized by the very people whose vital interest it was never to recognize it, had assumed whatever outward forms it judged most likely to consolidate its domination. The usurper had alternately threatened and cajoled the peoples of Europe he had assembled vast armies to terrorize them he had lied to them to confuse their minds he had made treaties to reassure their conscience as the years passed even his origins had begun to be forgotten The governments which he had overthrown whether republics or king

doms were apparently without hope or resources but they still lived in the hearts of their peoples Twenty battles were lost but the faith of the peoples was not shaken one battle was won and the usurper was everywhere put to flight and in many countries where the usurper ruled without opposition the traveler today would be hard put to it to find a vestige of his power

Why Cannot Usurpation Be Maintained by Force?

BUT why cannot usurpation be maintained by force? Does it not, like other governments have jailers and soldiers? What more is needed to maintain order?

Ever since the first usurper sat upon a throne

The battle of Leipzig October 16-18 1813 H.B L.

with gold in one hand and an axe in the other this *argument* has been presented again and again in an astonishing variety of forms.

A legitimate government calls upon these jailers and soldiers only in cases of extreme emergency because of the opposition which it encounters on all sides usurpation must employ them constantly Despotism which a legitimate government only imposes on its subjects at intervals and in times of crisis, is a constant state and a daily practice of usurpation.

The prolonged practice of despotism is impossible today Like usurpation and conquest despotism is a third anachronism

At this point the reader may find Constant's use of the terms *despotism* and *usurpation* confusing Previously in speaking of despots he was thinking of the despots of antiquity like Cyrus. In the following passages he uses the word despotism to signify the harsh governments of the French Revolution as distinguished from the *government of the usurper* Napoleon. H B L.

Let us give some explanation of this assertion let us first show why it came to be believed that our generation was willing to resign itself to despotism. It was because ignorant harsh and stubborn men forced upon them a freedom no longer suitable to their epoch and because in the name of that freedom they were subjected to a tyranny worse than any so far known to history It is not surprising then that our generation blindly fearing freedom was precipitated into the most abject servitude

We may be grateful to despotism for having done its best to cure them of this shameful error

For it has proved that in its true colors without disguises or palliatives despotism causes at least as many evils as that which had been so ironically called freedom

The tyranny and terror of the French Revolution. H B L

Napoleon s rule. H.B.L.

Is Despotism a Necessary Preliminary to Freedom?

OUR legislators proclaimed that despotism was the necessary preliminary to freedom

There are certain axioms which seem clear because they are short Cunning men throw them as a sop to the masses stupid men make use of them because it saves them the trouble of thinking, and repeat them to give the impression that *they understand what they are saying* The above axiom is one of these it has been proclaimed from every platform in France for the past ten years. Yet what is meant by it? Freedom is of inestimable value to us because it develops in us accuracy of mind strength of character and elevation of spirit. But do these advantages not actually depend upon the existence of freedom? If to bring it about you first establish despotism

what is actually being set up? Empty forms the spirit of freedom will never be in them

How should one speak to a people to convince them of the advantages of freedom? You have been oppressed one should say by a privileged minority most of you have been sacrificed to the ambitions of a few inequitable laws have protected the strong against the weak your pleasures have been precarious, depending on the whim of an arbitrary power which might at any moment deprive you of them you have contributed neither to the making of your laws, nor to the election of your magistrates. Now these abuses shall disappear your rights shall be restored

But how do they address the people who affirm that despotism is necessary to establish freedom? No privilege, they say shall oppress you but every day those who are suspected will be condemned without a hearing virtue shall be the only title of honor but persecuting fanatics will

be encouraged to found an aristocracy of terror· property shall be protected by law but the property of suspected persons or classes will be seized you may elect your magistrates but if you do not elect those prescribed by the aristocracy of terror your choice will be set aside there shall be freedom of opinion but any criticism not only of the system but of any passing measure will be considered a crime.

Such was the language, and such was the practice of the French reformers for many long years.

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Freedom they said must be postponed until factional passions had subsided but factional passions can subside only when freedom is no longer postponed Coercive measures employed until the proper public spirit should be born prevented the birth of this spirit a vicious circle was created the end in view could never be attained because the means chosen prevented it from being real-

ized. The use of force entailed the use of more force anger caused increased anger laws were forged like instruments of war legal codes became declarations of war until the deluded partisans of freedom imposed by despotism raised up against themselves the revolt of all free men

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It was in the name of freedom that men were threatened with jails and gallows and subjected to odious measures of tyranny so that the word itself aroused feelings of fear and hatred

But must one therefore conclude that modern men are prepared to accept despotism? What has been the reason for their stubborn resistance to the freedom offered them? Their firm determination not to give up their peace their pleasures or their way of life. However since despotism is the most irreconcilable enemy of all peace and all pleasure, does it not follow that while they thought they

abhorred freedom they really abhorred despotism?

I do not mean by despotism governments in which the powers are not expressly limited but in which there are nevertheless some intermediaries in which the administration is restrained by a tradition of freedom and justice in which the habits and customs of the people are shown some consideration or in which the independence of the courts is recognized Such governments may be imperfect but they are not wholly despotic

By despotism I mean a government in which the will of the ruler is the only law where he looks upon himself as the sole owner of his empire

Twenty years ago there was no such government in Europe. Today there is one —the government of France I affirm that this government

is based on the same principle as that government which modern men so abhorred when it raised the flag of freedom This principle is arbitrariness The only difference is that instead of being exercised in the name of many it is wielded in the name of one man Does this make it any the easier to endure?

The Fallacy that Arbitrary Power in the Hands of One Man Is a Lesser Evil

YES say the apologists arbitrary power in the hands of one man is not so dangerous as when it is being fought over by contending factions —the interests of one man invested with unlimited power are always the same as those of his people.

The governments of the French Revolution. H B L.

But are the interests of the possessor of unlimited power necessarily the same as those of his subjects? I admit that there is an ultimate point at which the two interests converge but are they not widely divergent before reaching this point? In matters of taxes war and police measures for example there is a wide gap between what is just, that is to say indispensable and measures which would be dangerous to the ruler himself Supposing him to be a reasonable man a ruler with unlimited power will try not to go beyond the danger point but he will often exceed what is just. And that in itself is an evil

Even if we grant that there is an identity of interest does this constitute an infallible guarantee for the governed? We are told daily that it is clearly to the self-interest of each man to respect the rules of justice yet laws are made against those who violate just procedure so well-known

is it that men frequently disregard their own self interest.[1]

Finally does the power to govern whatever form it may take, reside in fact in the man who has the supreme authority? Is that authority not subdivided not shared with thousands of subordinates? Are the interests of the innumerable officials the same as the interests of those they govern? Of course not in the lives of each official is a rival whose losses might enrich him an inferior whose humiliation might be flattering someone whose removal from office might mean advancement or at least relief from an irksome supervision

To defend this system it is not enough to prove the identity of interests but to prove

As Spinoza said It is absurd to believe that he alone would not be carried away by his desires whose position subjected him to the strongest temptations and who could the most easily and with the least danger surrender to them.

the existence of universal disinterestedness Heading the political hierarchy must be a man without passion or caprice impervious to bribery hatred favors anger or jealousy active, vigilant, tolerant of all points of view willing without pride to admit his own mistakes consumed by a desire to do good yet knowing how to curb his impatience and to give due consideration to the needs of gradualness under him must be ministers endowed with the same virtues, dependent but not servile, living under a system of arbitrary power yet never tempted by fear or greed to take advantage of their position and finally in the lowest ranks must be found the same combination of rare virtues the same love of justice the same forgetfulness of self these are the necessary hypotheses do they seem probable to you?

Should a single link in this chain of preternatural virtues snap the whole system is imperiled The separated sections of the broken chain may re-

main as virtuous as ever but truth in its perfection will no longer ascend directly to the leader· justice will no longer reach down pure and undefiled into the ranks of the common people. A single false transmission will suffice to mislead the supreme authority and to arm it against innocence.

When despotism is extolled it is always taken for granted that all dealings would be with the despot but necessarily there must also be dealings with his subordinates. It is then no longer a question of ascribing superlative intelligence and supreme intelligence to one man but of assuming that there can be one hundred or two hundred thousand such godlike creatures

And therefore Frenchmen are being duped by those who say to them Your master s interests are identical with your interests Do not be afraid his arbitrary power will not strike you It strikes only at those who are foolish enough to challenge

it Accept the situation remain silent and you will be safe."

Reassured by these false *promises men are now* not rising up against their oppressors but are try ing to put the blame on the victims of oppression None know how to be brave, even from self interest. Thus tyranny is given a free hand by the *timid men who hope that as a reward they at* least may be spared.

Fortunately for the morals of the human race, it is not possible to stand aside and let others be attacked. We are bound to one another by a *thousand ties and* even the *most frightened* ego-ism cannot dissolve them all. You believe that you are safe in your voluntary obscurity but you have a son and his youthful enthusiasm carries him away you have a brother less prudent than your self who has whispered a complaint you have a forgotten enemy whose vanity you once slighted he is influential now your Alban villa has taken

the fancy of one of the praetorian guards What will you do now? Having bitterly disapproved of the protests of others and rejected their complaints will you now protest yourself? You are condemned in advance both by your own conscience and by that abject public opinion which you have helped to create Will you submit without resistance? Will you indeed be allowed to submit? An importunate victim a testimony to injustice such as yourself will be removed and persecuted Innocent people have disappeared before thus you deemed them guilty thus you made ready the path which you in your turn now tread.

Arbitrary Power Destroys Morality and Security

ARBITRARY power whether exercised in the name of one man or of all men invades men s lives disturbing them in their peaceful pursuits and in their private happiness.

It destroys morality for without security there can be no morality if men can have no assurance that the innocent objects of their affections are safe, they will give up all affectionate intercourse. When arbitrary power ruthlessly attacks men on mere suspicion it does more than persecute individual men it outrages and finally degrades the whole nation Men tend always to escape from suffering When what they hold dear is in danger they either detach themselves from it or they defend it Morality is rapidly corrupted in cities attacked by the plague," says M de Paw even the dying rob one another there." Arbitrariness

is morally what the plague is physically men re pel the advances of their wretched fellow men they cut the ties of their past life as a precaution each man tries to isolate himself from the others and looks upon the pleas of the weak or of former friends for help as threats to his own security Only one thing retains its value not public opinion not justice but money Money can appease the tyrant money can buy off some of his agents money can make exile more tolerable facilitate escape and provide a few fleeting pleasures in lives which are constantly threatened.

When a people view with indifference one tyrannical act after another when without a mur mur they watch the prisons fill up letters of banishment increase can anyone believe that a few commonplace phrases will be able to revive in them generous and honorable sentiments? There is talk of the need of paternal authority but the

first duty of a son is to defend his oppressed father and where fathers may be removed from the bosom of their families and their children are obliged to maintain a cowardly silence, what can be the effect of your maxims and your codes, of your declamations and your laws? There is talk of the sanctity of marriage but on mere suspicion by a secret denunciation, under what is called a police measure husbands are separated from their wives wives from their husbands. Is conjugal love then supposed alternately to be quenched and re born at the good pleasure of the authorities? Family ties are much extolled but the cornerstone of family life is personal freedom the justifiable ex pectation of living together of living in freedom under the protection which justice pledges to all citizens If family ties existed today would the fathers the children the husbands the wives the friends and the relations of those whom arbitrary power persecutes submit to this power? There is

talk of credit of commerce, of industry but the man who is arrested has creditors and their wealth depends on his he has associates and they have a financial stake in his enterprises His imprisonment means more than his temporary loss of liberty it means the interruption of his business activities perhaps his ultimate ruin This disaster will affect all the joint sharers in his business. It extends even further it reacts on public opinion it strikes at security everywhere. When an innocent man suffers persecution all men capable of reasoning feel threatened and they are right for then the guarantee has been destroyed They may remain silent because they are afraid but all their activities are affected The earth quakes beneath their feet and they walk in dread.

All things are related to one another in our complicated social organism. Wrongs which are described as partial are a never-ending source of public misfortune it has not been given to gov

ernment to circumscribe them within set bounds Men are not able to come to terms with iniquity A single barbaric law determines the whole legal system. No just law is inviolable if an illegal measure exists. Freedom cannot be denied to some men and granted to others Men would indeed like to traffic with justice for one day to overcome one obstacle, they would like to dispense with its rigors after that they would be willing to endure them again. They want the settled security of the rule of law and the immediate profit which comes from breaking it. Nature refuses such a compromise her system is whole and orderly A single deviation destroys that system just as the answer to a mathematical problem is made incorrect by a single error whether of one or of many numbers

Arbitrary Power Stifles Intellectual Progress

PEACE industry domestic happiness private virtue —the enjoyment of all these is not enough to satisfy man s needs nature has endowed him with intellectual powers if not more noble at least more brilliant More than all else, these powers are endangered by arbitrary power it first tries to bend them to its will then irritated by their resistance it finally suppresses them

There are, says Condillac, two kinds of barbarism the one precedes centuries of enlightenment the other follows them. The first is a desirable era compared to the second But today it is toward the second that the peoples of Europe are being led and in consequence their deterioration is proceeding rapidly for what degrades men is not that they are without certain intellectual powers but that they surrender them

Let us take an enlightened nation enriched by the labors of generations of scholars possessing masterpieces of all kinds having made great ad vances in the sciences and the arts. If the political authorities interfere with the expression of thought and the activities of the mind that nation will be able to live for a time on its past capital so to speak on its acquired knowledge but its ideas will no longer be renewed the creative principle will dry up As long as there remains a vestige of liberal principles there will be a sort of literary activity a sort of struggle against liberal writings and liberal principles. But this activ ity is a legacy from a past liberty As the last vestiges the last traditions of liberty are made to disappear there will gradually be less renown and less profit to be found in an increasingly superfluous attack upon them When everything has disappeared the attacks will cease for the attackers will find no adversaries silence will fall upon the

victors and the vanquished alike. Who knows but that the political authorities may impose silence? They will not wish dead memories to be revived old issues to be debated. They will clamp down upon their own too zealous partisans as well as upon their enemies They may forbid discussions, even on party lines, of all the great human problems like I know not what bigoted government which forbade the mention of God either favorably or otherwise They will make known the subjects which the human spirit may examine.

The career of thought properly speaking will be ended

Vainly will you claim that the human spirit may still shine in light literature that it may apply itself to the natural and exact sciences that it may devote itself to art. Nature in creating man did not consult political authority she decreed *that our intellectual faculties should be in close* relationship with one another and that if one were

interfered with all should suffer Independence of thought is as necessary even for light literature, for the sciences for the arts as air is for physical survival. (Without it) literature declines into anagrams and acrostics. Men of science become the mere depositaries of past discoveries when the human soul has been debased the artist loses the ability nobly to depict the human form

And this is not all commerce the professions and the essential trades soon feel the effects of the general apathy Commerce is not of itself a sufficient incentive to action the incentive of self interest has been greatly exaggerated there must be a public opinion if self-interest is to function effectively for a man to whom freedom of opinion has been long denied, is not easily moved even by his own self-interest. A kind of stupor possesses him and just as paralysis spreads from one part

of the body to another so this stupor spreads from one faculty to the other



Intellectual independence even affects military successes At first sight there may seem to be no relation between the public spirit of a nation and the discipline and valor of an army yet this relationship is constant and essential It is customary today to consider soldiers merely as docile instruments which one must know how to use with shrewdness this is in one sense, only too true Yet these soldiers must be aware of a certain public support their spirit is quickened by it almost without their knowing it It is like the sound of the music to which they march into battle. None of them follows the tune attentively but by it they are all stirred inspired and carried away It was the spirit of the Prussian people as well as the

armies of Frederick the Great which enabled him to fight off a European coalition



Thought is the origin of all things to it are due the advances made in industry in military and all other sciences and in the arts it is by subjecting these advances to the analysis of thought that the horizons of thought are extended If arbitrary power tries to restrain it, morality will degenerate factual knowledge will become less exact the sciences less inventive, military sciences less developed and industry less fertile in new discoveries.



The intellect of man cannot stand still if it is left free it will advance if it is restrained it will recede if it is disheartened and loses faith in itself it will function languidly whatever be the field assigned to it.

It does not lie in the power of political authority to put nations to sleep and to reawaken them at will Life is not something which can be alter nately taken away and given back.

And should a government wish to supplement the genuine activity of a fettered public opinion by activities of its own it would face a difficult task.

When men are free each man takes an interest in what he is doing and gets enjoyment out of what he says or writes But when the great mass of the people are reduced to the role of spec tators, the directors of public opinion have to provide dramatic action and continual change of scene in order to receive applause or even attention from them

This directed excitement is as a matter of fact, more apparent than real There is movement but under orders and backed up by threats There is obedience but not cooperation. At the

slightest interruption the machinery stops working It is like a game of chess in which the chessmen are moved by the hand of government. No chessman resists but, if the arm of power should for a moment be removed all the chessmen would remain motionless.



If these are the consequences of arbitrary power whatever form it adopts men cannot voluntarily submit to it. Hence they cannot voluntarily submit to despotism which is one form of arbitrary power just as what was called freedom" was another form of it

Can Despotism Be Maintained?

IF USURPATION is to maintain itself through despotism then despotism must be able to maintain itself Now I ask in what civilized nation of modern Europe has despotism been main-

tained? I have already defined what I mean by despotism after consulting history I find that such governments have always dug a pit into which they have in the end fallen. Absolute power has always collapsed just when a long and successful struggle had removed all obstacles and seemed to promise a peaceful and durable existence.

In England Henry VIII established absolute power Elizabeth consolidated it. We admire the unlimited authority of this queen all the more so because she made moderate use of it. But her successor was obliged to contend unceasingly against a people which was supposed to have been subdued and his successor by his death marked the English revolution with blood stains which a century and a half of freedom and of glory have not yet washed out.

In his *Memoires* Louis XV obligingly relates all that he did to destroy the authority of the

parliaments the clergy and other intermediary bodies. He congratulates himself upon the increase of his powers which thus became unlimited his actions, he feels should earn him the gratitude of all the kings to come. He wrote about the year 1666 one hundred and twenty-three years later the French monarchy was overthrown

The reasons for this are simple and manifest the institutions which serve as barriers to power serve at the same time as props for it. They steer the ruler on his course they support him in his exertions they moderate the outburst of his anger and encourage him in his moments of apathy They unite the interests of the different classes around him. But when these institutions are destroyed the ruler finding nothing to guide or restrain him, is forced to act at random by inspiration alone his conduct becomes capricious and unpredictable Having no fixed rules to fall back upon he advances and retreats never

sure whether he is doing enough or too much Now he flies into a rage and nothing can calm him now he is seized with depression and nothing can rouse him His arbitrary power is a sort of responsibility mixed with remorse which disconcerts and torments him.

It is often said that the prosperity of free states is short lived that of absolute power is far more fleeting No despotic state has endured at its full strength as long as British freedom.

Despotism runs three risks that it will cause the people to revolt and they will overthrow it that it will enervate them and if it is attacked from abroad that foreign enemies will overthrow it or if it is not attacked from without that it will gradually decay from within

Everything confirms Montesquieu's maxim that security diminishes in proportion to the *growth of power* (*Esprit des Lois* ch. VII)

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When a Legitimate Government Uses Arbitrary Methods It Destroys the Purpose of Its Existence

WHEN a legitimate government allows itself to use arbitrary methods it sacrifices the purpose of its existence to the means which it takes to preserve its existence. Why do we authorize the government to restrain those who would attack our property our freedom or our lives? Because we wish to make secure our enjoyment of these very things. But if our prosperity can be destroyed our freedom threatened and our lives disrupted by arbitrary measures, what benefits do we get from the protection of the government? Why do we authorize the government to punish conspiracy against the state? Because we fear that the conspirators will substitute oppressive power for our legal and moderate

system of government. But if the government itself uses oppressive power what are the advantages to us in retaining it? A slight advantage at first perhaps and for a short time. The arbitrary measures of an established government are always less in number than those of factions which have yet to establish their authority But this advantage quickly passes as the use of arbitrary methods becomes general. Once accepted these methods are found to be so quick and so convenient that there is no desire to use others Put forward at first as an extreme expedient under very exceptional circumstances arbitrary measures soon become the solution for all problems and the daily practice. Then not only do the government s enemies increase in number as the victims of political authority multiply but the mistrust of the government toward its enemies grows out of all proportion to their number One violation of freedom calls for other

violations and once started on this course, a government descends in the end to the level of the factions it is fighting

There are many who talk easily about the advantages of arbitrary measures and of that extra-judicial speed which by leaving no time to the subversive elements to catch their breath, strengthens order and maintains peace. But let us refer to the facts since they are so often mentioned in this connection let us judge the system by the proofs adduced in its favor

The Gracchi we are told endangered the Roman republic. All legal forms were powerless against them the Senate twice resorted to the awful law of necessity and the republic was saved The republic saved! In fact the downfall of the republic dates from this period All rights under the law were disregarded all constitutional forms were overthrown The people had only asked for

equality of privileges they swore retribution against the murderers of their champions and the ferocious Marius administered their revenge

The reign of Henry III was disturbed by the ambitions of the Guises It was considered impossible to bring them to judgment. Henry III had one of them assassinated did his reign become any the more peaceful? The Kingdom of France was rent by twenty years of civil war and forty years later the good king Henry IV was perhaps still expiating the crime of the last of the Valois



Unquestionably there are moments of extreme danger for all political societies which all the wisdom of man can hardly avoid But these dangers are not averted by violence and the denial of justice.



Be just, I would always advise men in the seats of power Be just, no matter what happens for if you were unable to govern with justice even without it, you will not govern long



Despotic Governments Cannot Stifle Discontent They Cannot Silence the Spirit of Man

IF THE recourse to arbitrary methods imperils rather than prolongs, the existence of legitimate governments which do not, like despotism have to contend with a united opposition from all classes then it is clear that a despotic government which employs only arbitrary methods, can never contain within itself even the germ of stability A despotic government lives from day to day maintaining itself by arbitrary power until arbi-

trary power seized by one of its own agents over throws it in its turn

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It is interesting to consider the principal acts of the first four years of Napoleon s government after the usurpation of Saint-Cloud. The peoples of Europe condoned this act because they believed it to be necessary although the difficulties which it claimed to settle, had as a matter of fact, been already dealt with by the sole use of constitutional power Consider first immediately after Saint-Cloud the deportation without trial of 30 or 40 citizens after that, the deportation of 130 more who were sent to die on the coast of Africa then the setting up of special courts while allowing the military commissions to remain in force next the elimination of the tribunate and the destruction of what remained of the representative system and finally the banishment of Moreau, the murder of the Duc d Enghien and the assassination of Pichegru etc Remember that these years may be considered as the most peaceful years of Napoleon s government, and that he had the most compelling reasons for wishing to preserve the outward forms of legality Since so shrewd and so cool a usurper could not avoid the use of arbitrary methods, although it was to his manifest interest to do so it must be that despotism and usurpation are by their nature doomed to make use of them.

To stifle discontented opinion in blood is the favorite maxim of certain great politicians. But discontent cannot be stifled. The more it is suppressed, the more terrible it becomes it enters into men s souls like the air they breathe, it becomes their habitual feeling, their fixed idea men do not assemble in order to conspire, but all men when they meet one another are conspiring

However abject may be the appearance of a nation noble and generous impulses will still live in the hearts of a few men they are there, and fed by righteous indignation these impulses will grow strong in silence. The rafters of the assembly halls may ring with furious eloquence the palace favorites express their contempt for the human race the flatterers of the people denounce pity· the flatterers of the tyrant mock at courage. But no era can ever be so abandoned by heaven as to produce a race of men fashioned as the tyrants would have them Hatred of oppression whether by one man

or by many has come down to us through the ages. The future will not betray so great a cause There will ever be found men to defend the innocent and to hunger after justice Nature has decreed that this breed of men shall survive no power has ever been able to exterminate them all no power ever shall Men of this breed will always obey this magnanimous impulse many will suffer many perhaps will perish but the earth which receives their ashes will be quickened by them and sooner or later will flourish



The despotism of France has driven out freedom from one land to another for a time the despot was successful in suppressing it in whatever land he invaded but as freedom fled from one continent to another it led the tyrant so far from home that at last he met his doom The genius of mankind awaited him at the outposts of the

earth to make his retreat more shameful his retribution more memorable.

Usurpation Can Only Be Maintained Through Despotism But Despotism Cannot Be Maintained.

IF A despotism is no longer possible today then the attempt to enforce usurpation through despotism is like believing that a collapsing structure can be held together by decaying beams

* * *

When a legitimate government having infringed upon popular liberties, returns to a policy of moderation and justice all men are grateful to it. It is a return to what they have known the memory of the past is there to reassure them If a usurper should renounce methods of violence

it would only be proof that he was weak. The lengths to which he might go in this direction would be as uncertain as those he had previously gone in an opposite direction he would be more despised yet not the less hated

Thus usurpation cannot subsist either without despotism because all interests rise up against it, or through despotism because despotism cannot last Usurpation therefore cannot endure.

France Under the Usurper

NO DOUBT the spectacle of France is one to discourage all hope. We see usurpation triumphant believing itself to be justified by all that happened before its rise to power *strong in the outrages* and errors of the past, boast ing of its contempt for mankind and its disdain of reason Ignoble greed cunning self-interest

consummate corruption have flocked to its standard. Intellect too is offering its services, intellect which when separated from conscience, becomes the vilest of tools. The prejudices of the ages, the injustices of all nations are brought together to build the new social order From the remote past, from distant lands are gathered the thousand disparate elements with which to fashion that total servitude offered as a model to the world.

Such conditions are more disastrous than the stormiest revolution. We may hate the seditious tribunes of Rome but we are overwhelmed by our contempt for the Senate under the Caesars.



When the unenlightened elements of society commit crimes the enlightened classes are not contaminated they are preserved from contagion by misfortune and since the compulsion of events sooner or later returns them to power they can

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revived by every tyrant. Thus Socrates has survived the persecutions of a deluded populace, and Cicero is not entirely dead in spite of the proscription of an infamous Octavius May their successors not lose heart! Let them dare to express their devotion to magnanimous ideas! They will win the approval of all upright men They will plead a noble cause before the whole world sustained by the prayers of men of good will

No People Ever Forsook True Freedom

NO PEOPLE ever forsook true freedom To say that men do so is to say that they prefer humiliation sorrow destitution and misery it is to pretend that they can submit without regret to parting from those they love, to having their lives disrupted their property seized their

opinions and their most private thoughts controlled and even their persons thrown into prison and led to the scaffold For it is against such abuses that the guaranties of freedom are instituted it is to be preserved from such outrages that we invoke freedom it is these abuses that the peoples fear abhor and hate. In whatever place, under whatever name they may be found men recoil from them in awe and terror What men abhorred in what their tyrants called freedom was slavery Today they have seen slavery in its true colors in its real character Can anyone believe that they loathe it less?

Missionaries of truth if your progress is checked redouble your zeal redouble your efforts Let the light everywhere shine forth May it grow brighter increase and be transformed! May truth be as untiring as persecution! Let some men act openly with courage, let others work shrewdly underground! Let truth prevail here

boldly proclaimed, there secretly whispered. Let us unite all our efforts let us renew our faith, let us work let us serve, let us stand ready!



No nation s cause is hopeless England during its civil wars gave many examples of inhumanity Indeed at that time England seemed to recover its sanity only to sink into servitude. Yet England has regained her place among the great, the good and the free peoples and in our day we have seen her become their inspiration and their hope.

Appendix

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

For assistance in checking the translation I wish to thank Miss Elizabeth Peel.

H.B.L.

NOTE

The chapter headings and numbers below follow Benjamin Constant's original tract. The page references are to the text of the selections in this translation.

PART I—THE SPIRIT OF CONQUEST

PART II—USURPATION